

INCREASE OUR FAITH, LORD**SERMON FOR October 3, 2010****World Communion Sunday****Scripture: Lamentations 3:19-26; 2 Timothy 1:1-14, Luke 17:5-7**

“Increase our faith, Lord!” Do you ever feel like your faith is weak, that you need someone to help you get more faith? Maybe there have been times when you have felt like the poet in Lamentations. A little background here: in 587 BC the Babylonian army destroyed Jerusalem and its Temple. These lamentations were written during this time of political, social and religious crisis. We are not sure of the identity of the author, possibly Jeremiah. One thing that is sure is that the poet is in great pain: homelessness, hunger, poverty, fatigue, imprisonment, and humiliation. He sees his condition as the result of God’s wrath; however, he remembers God’s promises of love and mercy and decides to wait patiently and to hope in God.

In our Gospel reading Jesus has just finished talking to the disciples about forgiveness, about having to forgive a person, even if he sins against them seven times a day. The disciples are incredulous; how could they practice this kind of forgiveness. This commandment seemed to go beyond reason just as did other teachings of Jesus such as love your enemies. So this is the background of the disciples coming to Jesus and asking for more faith.

Jesus responds that “if you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this tree, be uprooted and planted in the sea, and it would obey

you.” In other words it doesn’t matter the size of your faith; the important thing is that you have faith. What he is saying to encourage them is, “You have enough faith already.” It’s like being pregnant; you can’t be a little bit pregnant. You have faith or you don’t. In our Epistle lesson, Paul encourages his young companion, Timothy, that in spite of his youth and inexperience, the faith he has is enough to provide the required leadership to his community.

When we look around and see people doing amazing things because of their faith, it is understandable that we would feel—if only I had more faith, I could then do these remarkable things. I’m sure many of you are familiar with Dorothy Day the founder of the Catholic Worker Hospitality Houses, where she lived among the poorest of the poor, giving them food, shelter and love. She would sometimes overhear folks talking about her as a saint. She would get upset and say to the speaker, “don’t escape like that. You say that to convince yourself that you are different from me, that I am different from you. That is an easy excuse. I am not a saint. I am like you. You could do what I do if you wanted to. You don’t need any more than what you have.”

Sometimes my friends, it is overwhelming for us, and it was overwhelming for the disciples. How can I love my enemies, bring peace to those around me, clothe the naked, feed the hungry, spread the Good News of Jesus? How can I forgive seventy times seven those who have hurt me so badly? It’s tempting to say: I am not strong enough, wise enough, generous enough, healthy enough to do what Jesus taught us to do. We may not be able

to do it on our own; however, the Good News is that we are not alone. God is with us; God works through those who believe, God wants to transform our hearts and our minds as well as the world in which we live. All we need to do is reach down to that little mustard seed within us. We need to take that first step and know God will be with us and work through us. I have to remind myself of this each week when I sit down to write yet another sermon. We all have to let the grace of God be in us and work through us. A Chinese proverb tells us that the journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. Dr. King says a similar thing in our Thought for the Day. So take that first step and follow it up with other steps, knowing that God will use us to bring about God's kingdom. Fred Buechner says that faith is a journey without maps. If you are courageous enough to start walking, you will be more confident in your faith. Remember the faith you have right now is all you need because God has faith in you, and will work with you and through you.

The needs of this world are so great. This church is good about helping others, and I thank you for the contributions you will be making today for Neighbors in Need. We have needs in this community. The Deacons fund helped a local family with a Shaw's card and some money for utilities this past week. Both husband and wife are on disability, with physical and extreme mental problems. Their electricity bill is over \$2500; thank goodness PSNH worked out a plan of \$400 a month so they will not have the power turned off. That still makes it difficult to keep their budget on track. From here in Deering, the world's problems extend to Africa, South America, the Middle

East. We think about the hunger, the floods, the ravages of war around the world. We think of those mourning the losses, both of family, friends, their homes, their livelihoods. World Communion Sunday can help us think more deeply about our connection with the church across the world. I'm so glad that Jesus is with us all wherever there is faith, even if it is as small as a mustard seed. Jesus is there whenever Christians practice loving and caring for each other. Remember we don't need to do great things...but small things with great love. We don't need more faith...we need to use the faith we have!

Remember that God never gives up on us. We may get discouraged when our membership and offerings are not growing. This church in Deering has survived for many years, even after being down to 3 members at one time. I believe that God will hear our prayers and bless our work and that there will be another season where Deering Community Church not only survives but thrives. God wants us to be a family that pays attention to the needs of our own members as well as stretching out to the larger community and world. We are just one part of God's huge family. We are called to love others as God loves us, to forgive as we have been forgiven. My church family, remember the faith you have right now is enough faith for you to do amazing things with the help and grace of our Lord. Amen.